

## **4.1 VISUAL RESOURCES**

This section describes the existing visual characteristics of the project site and evaluates the visual effects of the proposed project. This visual impact analysis considers existing scenic resources and the potential visibility of the site from surrounding areas and major viewsheds.

Visual simulations of the proposed project were prepared for three representative viewpoints in the surrounding vicinity. The methodology used to prepare the visual simulations is described in Appendix B. This visual resource analysis is based on field surveys of the site and surrounding areas and interpretation and analysis of existing views of the proposed project site compared to simulated views of the project site in relation to the surrounding vicinity. Although, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is not subject to the requirements of local plans and policies, the visual resource plans and policies of local jurisdictions are described below, where applicable. An analysis of the project's consistency with such plans and policies is presented in Section 4.3, "Land Use and Planning," of this DEIR. So that the visual simulations are easier to compare with existing conditions, all exhibits depicting the existing and existing plus project (simulated) viewsheds are presented together at the end of this section.

### **4.1.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

#### **VISUAL SETTING**

San Quentin State Prison (SQSP) is located in Marin County along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay at the southern edge of the San Quentin Peninsula. In general, SQSP is located in a relatively undeveloped area of the generally urbanized Marin County. SQSP is separated from most surrounding land uses by the San Francisco Bay on the south and east, and the prominent ridgeline of San Quentin Peninsula on the north. Residential and commercial areas of the city of Larkspur and Greenbrae community are located west of the site (Exhibit 4.1-1).




The visual setting of SQSP consists of open areas that are undeveloped and graded (the prominent topography of Dairy Hill), existing aged buildings associated with current and past prison operations, and the organized neighborhood of prison employee residences, which are set against a dramatic visual backdrop of large and architecturally distinctive, old prison buildings. In general, the less developed areas of SQSP are located near West Gate and the center of the prison, and development increases toward the eastern portions of the prison. Sir Francis Drake Boulevard is located along the northern border of SQSP. The main prison facilities and residential areas of San Quentin Village are located east of the SQSP.

Because of its history, dramatic appearance, and extended presence dating back to the 1850s, the existing SQSP facilities are well known and sometimes sought out by local viewers. SQSP facilities have frequently been used in films (television and movies) because of their "traditional" prison appearance and the associated history. The main SQSP buildings, with their ochre and brick colors, height (over 100 feet tall), and dominating appearance, are often described as "castle-like," or as what one "expects a prison to look like." The existing buildings, by virtue of their history, age, and appearance, are an integral part of the local landscape.

SQSP stands out visually in the regional viewshed because of its distinguished architectural style and the prominence of on-site structures in a relatively undeveloped area. SQSP is visible from the west and south, such as from the cities of Corte Madera and Larkspur. Views of the site from the north (i.e., San Rafael) are obstructed by the intervening San Quentin Ridgeline. Views of SQSP are generally located in mid-distance and background views depending on the specific location of viewpoints within Corte Madera and Larkspur. In general, views of SQSP from areas within Larkspur primarily consist of mid-distance views, while views of SQSP from Corte Madera are primarily background views. Foreground views (i.e., close-range views) of SQSP are only available from a few locations along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and from the bay (to passersby on the ferry and to recreationists).



**Legend**

-  Project Site
-  SQSP Property
-  Viewpoint Location



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Source: EDAW 2007

**Representative Viewpoint Locations**

**Exhibit 4.1-1**

Building 22, the location of the proposed Central Health Service Center (CHSC), is located in the midst of the larger prison structures, and is visually dominated by the existing cell blocks. At its highest point, Building 22 is 62 feet above the lower yard, approximately 40 feet shorter than the 102-foot tall adjacent cell blocks. This is discussed in more detail in the descriptions of the various viewsheds below.

Because SQSP is a prison facility, it is required to operate 24 hours per day. Nighttime illumination of SQSP is required to provide adequate safety and security. As a result of its location, in a relatively undeveloped area, the prison's existing nighttime lighting sources (i.e., high mast lighting, pole-mounted bollards, and perimeter lighting) are a dominate light source in the local viewshed. In general, nighttime lighting sources at SQSP consist of perimeter lighting on existing buildings and prison employee residences, and some pole-mounted lighting around the perimeter of the prison. The main prison facilities that surround Building 22 are substantially more lit up at night with high-mast lighting than other areas of SQSP. Other, less prominent nighttime lighting sources in the local area consist of the residential and commercial areas of Larkspur Landing, the Larkspur Ferry Terminal, and the city/town centers of Larkspur and Corte Madera, respectively.

### **VISIBILITY OF PROJECT SITE FROM LOCAL VIEWPOINTS**

Off-site areas with views of the CHSC site (now Building 22) can be divided into three major viewsheds: the Greenbrae viewshed, the Larkspur ferry boat viewshed, and the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard viewshed. No off-site views of the warehouse site would be available as it is located in the interior of the site, surrounded by other warehouse buildings and would only be one-story tall. As such, views of the warehouse from off-site locations are not evaluated further in this section.

The only areas within SQSP that have views of Building 22 and warehouse sites are the on-site prison employee residences and the main prison facilities. Because the prison employee residences have existing views of the main facilities of SQSP, the residences are on the project site and are a prison-related use, views of the project site from these residences would not be considered a sensitive public view, and therefore, are not evaluated further in this section. Although San Quentin Village, a local residential community, is located adjacent to SQSP near East Gate, residents of this community do not have views of this part of the project site because of existing topography and intervening prison buildings, and proposed buildings would not be visible from this local viewshed.

Views of the CHSC site would be available from several locations; representative viewpoints were selected to characterize the visual changes that would occur with implementation of the project. Viewpoints were selected where direct views (i.e., unobstructed) of the site that are publicly accessible are available. Although some private views of the site are available, the selected viewpoints would provide a realistic representation of the visual changes anticipated to occur with implementation of the project. Based on field-reconnaissance survey of potential representative viewpoints, three viewpoints were selected for consideration in this analysis. These viewpoints represent the three major viewsheds with views of the project site and consist of a view from the Greenbrae boardwalk, which is the closest residential area that could view the site; a view from Larkspur ferry, which provides the closest direct view of the site; and a view from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (west), which provides the most unobstructed viewpoint from any roadway passing near the site. In addition to being representative, these viewpoints also provide the most prominent available local views of the site.

Photographs of existing site conditions were taken from each of the three viewpoints. These photographs were then used to prepare photo simulations of the proposed project. The following describes the existing visual setting of the project site from each of the three representative viewpoints. The viewpoint discussions are organized by the major viewsheds. Exhibit 4.1-1 identifies the location of the representative viewpoints and where the site was photographed.

#### ***Greenbrae Viewshed***

Exhibit 4.1-2a depicts the existing views of the project site from the Greenbrae viewpoint across San Francisco Bay. This viewpoint is located west of the project site across a narrow waterway and is along the Greenbrae

Boardwalk residential area. The site selected in the photograph is the closest site in this area that would have an unobstructed view of the site (any closer and the view of the site would be obstructed by Dairy Hill, the hill located on SQSP). The project site is in the background views from this viewpoint. Views of houses, power poles, marsh habitat, and San Francisco Bay are present in the foreground and middle ground views, respectively. San Quentin Ridgeline, the West Block building, the North Block building, and warehouse buildings are visible in the background. The landform of Dairy Hill and the guard tower that sits on Dairy Hill are visible from this viewpoint. The project area appears to be heavily developed, with buildings concentrated directly to the right of Building 22 (the project site). but the overall viewshed, which extends well beyond the project site, is generally undeveloped to the northeast (left side of photograph), with views of San Quentin Ridgeline and the existing water storage tank. Overall, the project site (Building 22) is dominated by views of prison development and existing prison buildings. Building 22 is not a visually distinctive component of the viewshed from this viewpoint.

### ***Ferry Boat Viewshed***

The Larkspur ferry passes south of the site as it travels from the Larkspur Ferry Terminal to the San Francisco ferry building. Passengers on the ferry have direct, short-term, and close-up views of the project site and SQSP. In general, passengers on the ferry boat would have a foreground view of the project site for approximately 2 minutes as the boat passes directly in front of the site. Exhibit 4.1-3a depicts existing views from southwest of the project site, from the ferry boat. The project site is visible in the mid-distant views, and views of prison buildings are the prominent features on the project site. From this viewpoint, there are views of the undeveloped hillside areas north of the project site and the San Quentin Ridgeline. The large cellblock buildings and existing warehouse buildings are visible to the right (east) of the project site and appear to tower over all other structures at SQSP. Aside from the large cell blocks, SQSP appears visually cluttered, with buildings of varying heights, different architectural styles, and colors, and little to visually unify the buildings. Toward the center of SQSP the top rim of the existing water storage tank is visible along the ridgeline.

From this viewpoint, Building 22 appears as a somewhat disjointed building, with varying heights. It is located in the area of SQSP that is visually cluttered, and does not add to any unifying visual themes on the site. While quite visible from this viewpoint, it is not visually distinctive and has no visible striking architectural features.

### ***Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Viewshed***

Views of the project site are available from some isolated viewpoints along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard near the West Gate entrance to SQSP, and the most prominent viewpoint of the site was selected for evaluation. The view of the site from most other areas along this roadway is obstructed by intervening landscape and buildings. Exhibit 4.1-4a presents existing views of the project site from the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard viewpoint west of the site. This viewpoint is located near West Gate and looks southeast at the project site. Views are available from people resting at the bus stop and motorists on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Motorists on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard would only have views of the project site at this viewpoint when traveling in the eastbound direction because of the existing curvature of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard near West Gate. Motorists traveling in the westbound direction would be turning away from the site as Sir Francis Drake Boulevard curves around hillside areas north of the site and would have difficulty seeing the site when traveling in that direction. Motorists traveling in the eastbound direction would have direct views of the site and the photograph is representative of this view. Views of Dairy Hill, a guard tower, trees, and power poles are available in the foreground. Existing prison support buildings and vegetation are visible in the middle ground, and views of the existing main SQSP facilities are available in the background. From this viewpoint, the large cellblocks of SQSP are the dominant features of the viewshed, and Building 22 appears as a group of architectural indistinctive buildings. The guard tower on Dairy Hill is an isolated feature from this view.

#### **4.1.2 REGULATORY BACKGROUND**

The visual appearance of the shoreline and San Francisco Bay are of high priority in the planning documents of regional and local jurisdictions. Planning documents from adjacent areas with specific or general policies regarding the visual quality of SQSP or adjacent shoreline areas are discussed below.

##### **FEDERAL**

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws are applicable to the proposed project.

##### **STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

###### ***California Scenic Highway Program***

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) administers the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. Although no designated scenic highways would have views of the project site, limited views of the project site are available from a portion of U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101) that is eligible for listing as a designated State Scenic Highway. U.S. 101 is located approximately 2 miles west of the project site. U.S. 101 is a large transportation corridor and views of the site would only be available for a short time as drivers pass by the site at high speeds. Because views of the project site would be distant and limited because of vehicle speeds, existing development, and intervening terrain, this view was not considered a major viewpoint.

##### **REGIONAL**

No regional plans, policies, regulations, or laws are applicable to the proposed project.

##### **COUNTY OF MARIN**

###### ***Marin Countywide Plan 1994***

Although the project would not be subject to the local policies of the *Marin Countywide Plan*, the project site is located within the County's Bayfront Conservation Zone (Marin County Planning Department 1994). The plan contains aesthetic and scenic quality policies for the Bayfront Conservation Zone. Relevant policies are as follows:

- **Policy EQ-2.72.** Viewshed Protection. The County shall protect visual access to the bayfront and scenic vistas of water and distinct shorelines through its land use and development review procedures. This viewshed protection is essential for the preservation of Marin County and San Francisco Bay identity, for the enhancement of aesthetic qualities, and for visual and psychological relief from adjacent urban environments.
- **Policy EQ-2.73.** View Corridor Identification and Enhancement. Existing built elements, such as overhead utilities, which detract from the shoreline and marsh landscape should be eliminated or blended into the environment. Sites with opportunities for near and distant views of the bayfront and bay should be identified, protected and enhanced by improvements (turnouts, benches, etc.) where possible. View corridors and a low profile should be maintained on adjoining sites as well.
- **Policy EQ-2.74.** Design of Waterfront Development. Waterfront development should be designed for openness and to permit optimal views for public enjoyment of the bayfront.

- **Policy EQ-3.11.** Visual Qualities and Views. Visual qualities and the viewing potential of the natural and built environment shall be considered in any project or operation review. Tree cutting and damage shall be avoided wherever possible.

### ***Larkspur General Plan 1990—City of Larkspur***

SQSP is located within the City of Larkspur's sphere of influence. The *Larkspur General Plan* (City of Larkspur 1990) contains plans and policies related to aesthetic resources that include preserving the natural bay frontage and values views of these areas.

## **4.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This visual resource analysis is based on field surveys and review of existing and simulated views of the site in relation to the surrounding vicinity. For the analysis that follows, each simulated photograph of the proposed CHSC building was compared to the photograph depicting existing views of the site from the selected viewpoint. The visual comparison included identification of how the project would change foreground, middle-ground, and background views of the project site and surrounding vicinity, how the project would affect views of ridgelines, and how the project would affect views of existing facilities at SQSP. In addition, a discussion of how the visual character of the CHSC would blend with existing on-site buildings is also provided. This comparison is then summarized for each viewpoint and presented in the following impact analysis. The discussion of the viewpoints is organized by the three major viewsheds. No visual simulations were prepared for the proposed warehouse building because it would be constructed near the center of SQSP, would be one story tall, and would not be visible from off-site areas.

Current buildings on the site are unremarkable and visually (depending on the viewpoint) range from unnoticeable and visually dominated by the old cellblocks of the adjacent prison facilities, to drab, plain, and somewhat rundown in appearance. They do not visually dominate any viewshed. Existing SQSP facilities that dominate the viewshed are the relatively tall, old, "castle-like" structures that provide the distinctive visual character that defines SQSP to most people in the area.

The CHSC building constructed under the proposed project would be approximately 70-75 feet tall, would be constructed of concrete, masonry, and steel, and would be designed to be consistent with the existing architectural style of the institution. As a five-story building, it is visible from various off-site view corridors. As such, the character of the building, would relate contextually to the surrounding and adjacent structures that comprise the institution in the buildings form and articulation, rhythm, materials and color palette, developing a positive addition to the fabric of San Quentin. Additional description of project facilities is provided below.

### **THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The project would have a significant adverse visual impact if it would:

- have a substantial adverse affect on a scenic vista;
- substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and/or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

## ***Scenic Vistas and Resources***

The project site is not visible from a designated State Scenic Highway and would not have an adverse visual impact on any such facilities. No visually significant scenic resources (e.g., trees, rock outcroppings) are visible from off-site areas. As a result, the project would not have an adverse impact on any such resources.

With respect to scenic vistas, the remainder of this analysis addresses scenic vistas from specific representative viewpoints. Conclusions with respect to this issue are provided in the next section of this analysis.

*The project site is not visible from a designated State Scenic Highway and does not support any visually significant scenic resources (e.g., trees, rock outcroppings). As a result, the project would not have a substantial adverse effect on any such resources. This would be a less-than-significant impact (4.1-a).*

## ***Visual Character and Quality***

The project site is located in a visually sensitive setting, on the shoreline of San Francisco Bay. The shoreline represents an important visual amenity in the region and is visible from many surrounding locations. With implementation of the project, the existing Building 22, 62-feet tall at its highest point, would be replaced with a five-story CHSC building. The CHSC building would be approximately 70-75 feet tall, and is generally planned within the footprint of the existing Building 22, but would require a 20-foot extension to the width of the building toward the west and an 8-foot extension of the width toward the east. Visual screening of roof-mounted mechanical equipment is also proposed. The height of the adjacent North Block building is approximately 102 feet above the general population yard elevation and would be approximately 30 feet taller than the proposed CHSC. The North Block building would continue to be the tallest building at SQSP.

CDCR has specific design guidelines for exterior lighting fixtures. These guidelines require exterior lighting to be designed to avoid discomfort and minimize glare with respect to correctional staff in guard towers, control/observation areas, and adjacent properties (off-site). Security lighting would be mounted on the CHSC building and warehouse building at ground level. No high-mast lighting would be used as part of the proposed project.

The following visual analysis is organized by the three major viewsheds and describes the simulated visual changes that would occur with implementation of the project. The discussion describes how views of the site would be from the representative viewing areas discussed previously. This analysis does not attempt to document how views of the site would change from every possible viewpoint in the local area. Rather, it depicts the project from the key, representative viewpoints. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the representative viewpoints can be generally interpreted to reflect the visual change from similar viewpoints in the project area. Because the project is relatively small in relation to existing buildings on the site and the overall viewshed, it would not be visually prominent from any distant viewpoint.

## ***Greenbrae Viewshed***

From the Greenbrae viewpoint (Exhibit 4.1-2a and 4.1-2b), simulated foreground and middle-ground views of housing, marshland, and San Francisco Bay would be unchanged. Because the new CHSC building would be five stories, which is taller than the existing Building 22, there would be a slight change in the background views of SQSP from this viewpoint resulting in a minor addition of building mass in the location of Building 22. However, the CHSC building would appear from this viewpoint to be of similar size as the buildings it replaces and would be slightly smaller than adjacent existing prison facilities; it would not interfere with views of background ridgelines. Further, the CHSC building would not block views of the undeveloped areas north of the site. Overall, the existing SQSP cellblocks (in the right portion of the photo) are the largest and most dominant buildings at SQSP. The project would not alter the architectural features of the cellblocks and would result in a building with complimentary architectural features (e.g., color banding, windows) that would blend with the existing architectural theme of

existing buildings. The project site occupies only a small portion of the viewshed and would not alter existing architectural features at SQSP, nor would it alter the form or quality of the viewshed.

Consequently, the project would not substantially affect views from this viewpoint. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

*The CHSC building would appear to be of similar size as adjacent existing prison facilities when seen from the Greenbrae boardwalk residential area. This building would not substantially alter the viewshed from the Greenbrae viewpoint because it would not interfere with the background ridgelines, would not block views of the undeveloped areas north of the site, would not alter the existing architectural features of SQSP, and would not alter the form or quality of the viewshed. Therefore, this would be a less-than-significant impact (4.1-b).*

### **Ferry Boat Viewshed**

From the Larkspur Ferry viewpoint (Exhibit 4.1-3a and 4.1-3b), viewers would have close-range views of the project site. The new CHSC building would be five stories instead of the existing 3- and 4-story Building 22. The project would not interfere with San Quentin Ridgeline to the north and would continue to facilitate views of the undeveloped hillside areas north of the site. The CHSC building would alter the viewshed from this viewpoint. Building 22 has a visually disjointed appearance and it would be replaced by a building that repeats the visual themes of the more visually prominent adjacent cell blocks. The CHSC building would be similar in size, scale, mass, and style to the surrounding buildings, and would have linear architectural features and a uniform building structure that would make the views of the development at SQSP more organized and cohesive throughout the site. Overall, the CHSC building would blend with the existing surrounding development. Individuals have different preferences for what they find visually appealing or adverse, and consideration of visual changes is a somewhat subjective consideration. While there may ultimately be disagreement over whether the project structures are visually appealing, they do not substantially alter the viewshed from this viewpoint.

*The project would construct new facilities within the developed portions of SQSP. Although the CHSC building would be taller than the existing Building 22, it would not interfere with views of the San Quentin Ridgeline or the undeveloped hillside areas north of the site, and would not cause a substantial change in the views of SQSP. In addition, the CHSC building would be similar to surrounding buildings and would blend with the developed portion of SQSP. This would be a less-than-significant impact (4.1-c).*

### **Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Viewshed**

From the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (west) viewpoint (Exhibit 4.1-4a and 4.1-4b), the most noticeable change in the visual setting would be the existing Building 22 being replaced with the taller CHSC building. Although the CHSC building would be taller than the existing Building 22, the CHSC building would be of a compatible size, scale, mass, and style with existing adjacent prison facilities. Currently, views of the project site from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard consist of Dairy Hill (to the right in the photo), a guard tower, trees, and power poles in the foreground; existing prison support buildings and vegetation in the middle ground; and views of the existing main SQSP facilities in the background. With implementation of the project, the CHSC building would block views of some of the rooftops of existing buildings on-site; however, construction of the CHSC would make the views of the developed portion of SQSP appear more organized and cohesive because of the similar architectural styles that would be carried through the site. Views through the site would be altered, and the new buildings may or may not be more preferable to motorists on Sir Francis Drake than existing buildings. However, the change would not be substantial. The proposed project would not block views of Dairy Hill, and the CHSC would blend with the existing development in the background views. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

*The proposed CHSC building would result in minor changes in the viewshed along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard as drivers approach from the east. There would be no changes to the foreground or middle-ground views, and changes to background views would be minor. The CHSC building would block views of some of the existing*



*buildings on-site; however, the views of the developed portion of SQSP would appear visually consistent. This is a less-than-significant impact. (4.1-d)*

### **Nighttime Light and Glare**

Building 22 currently supports minimal lighting sources. The surrounding area is well lit with high mast and other security lighting. With implementation of the project, lighting would be added to an already illuminated area, and new lighting would be of similar type and intensity as existing lighting. Security lighting would be used on the CHSC and on new warehouse buildings at ground level, but no high-mast lighting would be used. The addition of this security lighting would not change the intensity of the existing lighting at SQSP and would not be discernible to viewers from surrounding viewpoints. Therefore, nighttime views of the project site would not substantially differ from existing nighttime views at any of the viewpoints.

*Because the project would not substantially alter nighttime lighting on the project site or from any of the surrounding viewpoints, nighttime light and glare impacts would be less-than-significant (4.1-e).*

### **4.1.4 PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES**

#### **LESS-THAN-SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS**

The following impacts were identified as less than significant, and therefore no mitigation is required:

**4.1-a:** Scenic Vistas and Resources

**4.1-b:** Visual Character and Quality (Greenbrae Viewshed)

**4.1-c:** Visual Character and Quality (Ferry Boat Viewshed)

**4.1-d:** Visual Character and Quality (Sir Francis Drake Boulevard [west] Viewshed)

**4.1-e:** Nighttime Light and Glare





Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision

Existing Views of the Project Site from the Greenbrae Viewpoint Across San Francisco Bay

Exhibit 4.1-2a



Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision 2007

Simulated Views of the Project Site from the Greenbrae Viewpoint Across San Francisco Bay

Exhibit 4.1-2b





Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision 2007

Existing Views from Southwest of the Project Site, from the Ferry Boat

Exhibit 4.1-3a

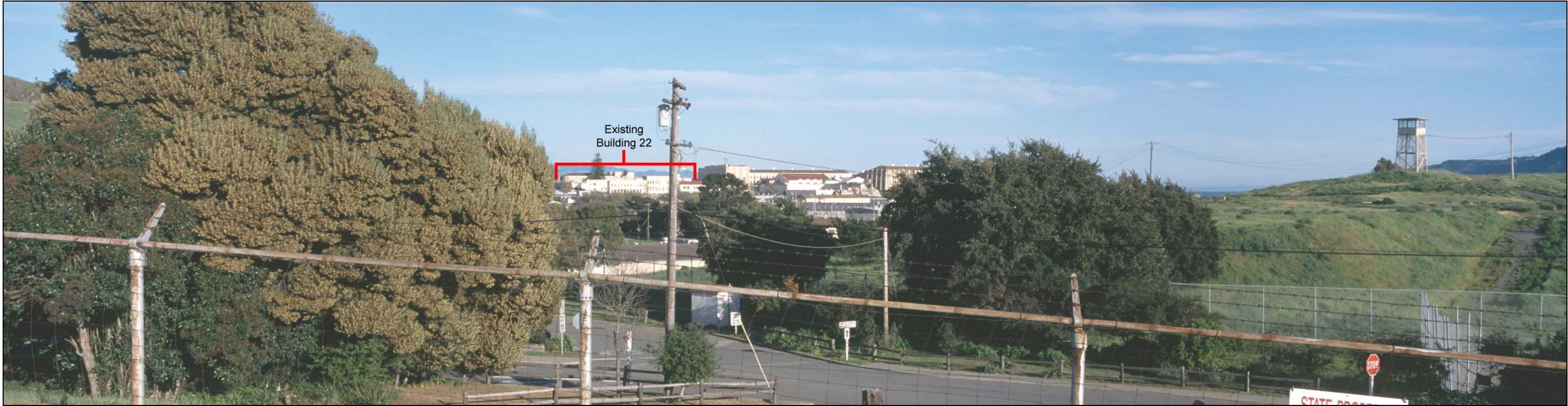


Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision 2007

Simulated Views from Southwest of the Project Site, from the Ferry Boat

Exhibit 4.1-3b





Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision 2007

Existing Views of the Project Site from the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Viewpoint West of the Site

Exhibit 4.1-4a



Source: EDAW 2007, Field of Vision 2007

Simulated Views of the Project Site from the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Viewpoint West of the Site

Exhibit 4.1-4b